

NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
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Fish and Wildlife Service Determines the Mountain Plover Does Not Warrant Protection Under the Endangered Species Act

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that the mountain plover, a native bird of short-grass prairie and shrub-steppe landscapes, does not warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act. After a thorough review of all available scientific and commercial information, we have determined that the species is not threatened or endangered throughout all or a significant portion of its range and are withdrawing our proposed listing of the mountain plover as a threatened species.

The Service originally proposed the listing of the mountain plover in February 1999 and amended that proposal in December 2002. Subsequently, we withdrew the listing proposal in September 2003 based on the conclusion that information available at that time did not indicate the threats to the mountain plover and its habitat were likely to endanger the species in the foreseeable future. In June 2010, we reinstated the 2002 proposed rule to list the mountain plover as a threatened species and invited public comments. Today's finding is based on a thorough review of all information and comments received regarding the reinstated proposal.

We determined that the mountain plover does not merit listing because threats to the species are not as significant as earlier believed and currently available data do not indicate that the threats to the species and its habitat, as analyzed under the five listing factors described in section 4(a)(1) of the Endangered Species Act, are likely to endanger the species in the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

We estimate the current mountain plover breeding population to be over 20,000 birds, more than double the estimate cited in our 2002 proposal to list the mountain plover as a threatened species. While we are not suggesting that these numbers reflect an actual population increase, a larger population provides added security from the threat of extinction. The mountain plover's geographically widespread breeding and wintering ranges and its ability to use a variety of habitats contributes to its security. Mountain plovers have adapted to many human activities, using crop fields for breeding and wintering, and benefitting from some cattle grazing practices. We conclude that human land use changes, alone or in combination with climate change, are not likely to result in significant population-level impacts to the mountain plover in the foreseeable future.

The mountain plover is a small bird about the size of a killdeer. It is light brown above, with a lighter-colored breast, but lacks the contrasting dark breastbelt common to many other plovers. During the breeding season, it has a white forehead and a dark line between the beak and eye, which contrasts with the dark crown.

Mountain plovers breed in the western Great Plains and Rocky Mountain States from the extreme southern Canada to northern Mexico. Within the United States, most breeding occurs in Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado; fewer breeding birds occur in Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah.

Mountain plovers winter in California, southern Arizona, Texas and Mexico. While California's Sacramento, San Joaquin, and Imperial Valleys are believed to support the greatest number of wintering mountain plovers, relatively little is known about their winter range use in other areas. Unlike other plovers, mountain plovers are not found near water, and will only inhabit areas with short grass or bare ground.

In November 2006, the Forest Guardians (now WildEarth Guardians) and the Biological Conservation Alliance filed a complaint challenging the withdrawal of the proposal to list the mountain plover. As part of the settlement agreement, we vacated the 2003 withdrawal of the listing proposal and reopened a public comment period on the 2002 proposal. We also agreed to submit a final listing decision to the Federal Register by May 1, 2011. Today's final determination satisfies the settlement agreement.

Our priority is to make implementation of the ESA less complex, less contentious and more effective. We seek to address the conservation needs of imperiled species before they require the protection of the Act. Our goal is to accelerate the recovery of threatened and endangered species across the nation, while making it easier for people to coexist with these species.

A copy of the finding and other information about the mountain plover is available on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/birds/mountainplover> or by contacting the Colorado Ecological Services Field Office Supervisor at 303-236-4773.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit **www.fws.gov**

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